

16 July 2003

COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY

CPA DAILY

Key Messages – Political Process

This past weekend, Iraq's new Governing Council was formed. This is a momentous step. The launch of the Governing Council means that Iraqis will now play a more central role in running their country.

The Governing Council will be an interim body. A body to ensure that all Iraqis' views are properly represented in this interim period.

The Governing Council will -- for the first time in Iraq's history -- bring together a balanced representative group of political leaders from across the country. It will represent the diversity of Iraq: whether they are Shi'a or Sunni, Arab or Kurd, Baghdadi or Basrawi, man or woman, all Iraqis will see themselves represented on this Council.

The Governing Council will be involved in all significant decisions the Iraqi Government and the Coalition take in the months ahead. The Council will name the new Ministers to lead Iraq's Ministries. And its members will be able to represent Iraq internationally. It will determine the budget for next year.

One of the Governing Council's first jobs will be to help launch the constitutional process. The constitution will be written by Iraqis and for Iraqis. It will not be written by the Coalition. Once the constitution is written, the Iraqi people will have an opportunity to approve it, and then hold elections for a sovereign government.

Key Quote

On Sunday an important step was taken towards fulfilling the second undertaking – the establishment of a sovereign, Iraqi Government. The convening of the Iraqi Governing Council is a significant development. The Council is the principal body of the interim administration called for in SCR 1483. Sergio de Mello has described the formation of the Council as a “defining moment” for Iraq “moving it back where it rightfully belongs: at peace with itself and as a full participant in the community of nations.”

The Governing Council has 25 members. Thirteen are Shia, eleven are Sunni and one is Christian. The Interim Chairman is a Shia cleric, Muhammed Bahr Al-Uloom. 20% of the Council is Kurdish, representing their share of the population. Fourteen members lived in Iraq throughout much of Saddam Hussein's rule. Three members are women – 12% of the Council.

The Governing Council will exercise significant powers. These should expand over time. I am placing in the Library a full list of members and the statement agreed between the Governing Council and the CPA establishing the authorities of the Council. Let me summarise the main points.

The Council will be involved in all of the decisions which the Coalition Provisional Authority takes from now on. It will nominate new Ministers to lead Iraq's Ministries, hold them to account and have the power of dismissal. Its members will be able to represent Iraq internationally. It will determine the national budget for next year.

The contrast with the Ba'athist regime could not be starker. Membership of the Council itself emerged from an exhaustive process of consultation among representative groups – many of whose leaders I met in Baghdad two weeks ago. The Council includes the leaders of 14 Iraqi parties, with prominent figures from Islamist groups and the Communist party. It will govern by consent not terror. It is the first time in living memory that the Shias – a majority in the country – have had a majority in any national governing body.

One of the Council's first jobs will be to determine how a new constitution for Iraq should be prepared. Once adopted, this constitution will pave the way for the election of an Iraqi Government which will assume all of the powers and responsibilities currently held by the CPA. Sergio de Mello will brief the UN Security Council next Tuesday on political developments and on the role of the Governing Council; the Council has already announced that it will be sending a delegation to the Security Council for this meeting.

Jack Straw, UK Foreign Secretary, Statement to the House of Commons, 15 July

Diary:

1400 – Press Briefing – Arabic Media

1500 - Police Graduation Ceremony